THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
BLOOM

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Cover. Detail of back, no. 6

Bloom

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
MATTHEW 6:28–29

Bloom is a celebration of flowers in fashion. A splendid array of flowers has always dwelled in the wardrobe, confirming that human striving for magnificence is only the simulation of nature's abundant beauty. To propose flowers in costume is, of course, to document only one of the countless floral manifestations of the Museum. Throughout The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bowers and bouquets of flowers thrive in paintings, pop into sculptural form, lend enchantment to porcelain vases and stained glass, and enhance the lush environments of manuscripts and tapestries. Painter Georgia O'Keeffe, no stranger to the singular beauty of flowers, proposed that "Nobody sees a flower really, it is so small, we haven't time." Herewith, we insist on finding the time to look at the flowers of fashion.

Lush and sensual, the flowers of grand dresses are not merely their surface decoration but their essential metaphor. Many couturiers, in fact, have had a signature flower: most notably, Chanel, the camellia, and Dior, the lily of the valley. The American designer Charles James looked to the forms of flowers as the sculptural shapes for his dresses of the 1940s and 1950s, and his unusual color mixes were often derived from the exotic palette of orchids. In 1952, Hubert de Givenchy created a scarlet rose bolero in which the cropped jacket virtually disappears into a festoon of petals that embraces the wearer. Further, Givenchy adds glass-bead drops of dew to mimic nature. Yves Saint Laurent's bride (1980) is a bouquet of lilies that literally surrounds and subsumes the woman within. Willa Kim's lettuce cocoon coat (1988) fulfills French illustrator and caricaturist J. J. Grandville's nineteenth-century fantasies and Walter Crane's "masque" of women transformed into vegetation by dress. A purse of violets (ca. 1938) by Elsa Schiaparelli is nonchalantly carried as if really a handful of flow-

ers freshly gathered, and Jean Patou's rose turban (1986) by Christian Lacroix interweaves the petals of the hat with the hair of the wearer.

Bloom creates fertile gardens of floral apparel around specific flowers—rose, lily, tulip—and floral subjects, including naturalistic botanical categories, stylized exotic fantasies, black "fleurs du mal," and a metamorphosed garden of women virtually transformed into flowers. The seventeenth century assigned taxonomy to the blooms and saw even the rich three-dimensional embroidery on a bodice as the text of a complete classification of natural forms. Floral eighteenth-century court dresses abound, their silk fringe often rendering into three-dimensional forms the same flowers of the textile design. Moreover, even men's clothing of the eighteenth century created marvelous bowers of brilliant flowers on coats and waistcoats. In the nineteenth century, bold designs of flowers and vegetation were a sign of perennial life and vitality even during the melancholy intervals of Victorian dress.

Historically, the cutting garden has been the precinct and responsibility of women. Flower growing and arranging, as evident from nineteenth-century women's magazines and etiquette handbooks, were special practices of women. Ultimately, flower and woman seemed to be united: floral and feminine beauty reflected one another. Further, the flowers and gardens beloved by Robert Louis Stevenson, Lewis Carroll, and Walter Crane were sites of innocent delight and inquiry.

Prodigal nature has provided many interpretations and ideas, from the chaste economies of Henry David Thoreau to the exuberant fantasies of William Wordsworth. Thus, to perceive the display and disposition of flowers, *Bloom* is organized—as if with seed packets marking each vitrine—around the patterns of floral representation beginning with the scientific and analytic systems that flourished in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Europeans realized that floraculture could be schematized and industrialized, even as colonies provided a plethora of new flowers and plants. The centuries of science enhanced flowers with the sureness of classification and cultivation. Botanical illustrations and floral still-life paintings, primarily subjected to science and secondarily

interpreted symbolically, flourished as Europe grasped both garden and flower as metaphors for empiricism. The design pattern of an eighteenth-century garden was a microcosm of the world, wherein every flower was assigned place and purpose. Similarly, dress of the period assumed botany as a textile knowledge and frequently embellished the flat flowers of textile patterns with the three-dimensional flowers of fly fringe and passementerie. The balance of art and science that was the concern of the botanical illustrator was at issue in fashion as well. By the 1770s, naturalistic renderings of blooms had insinuated themselves in garlands of more fanciful and schematic vegetation.

The global range of the garden brought foreign soil and plantings to Western Europe. Hothouses, winter gardens, and exotic plants became the museums of imperial botany in Europe and America through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eighteenth-century palm trees gave way to broad-leafed banana trees by the mid-nineteenth century, and Turkish tulips yielded to Japanese chrysanthemums in a history of botanical dissemination.

One flower, the rose, is at the center of the modern garden. Cultivated since ancient times, for centuries its delineation and propagation has produced variety and beauty in synthesis. Even today, the continued meticulous breeding of roses provides new examples as magical and rational as the discovery of new planets in astronomy. Fashion has documented the rose's continued mutation with a gardener's patience, all but denying Gertrude Stein's truism. The rose's dominance is due not only to its visual beauty but also to its distinctive fragrance. The delight, allure, and memory of a flower's perfume have long given fashion an additional sense of beauty.

Bloom is a joyous garden of nature's abundance and fashion's imagination. The lilies of Annunciations (including the Metropolitan's *Mérode Altarpiece*), the sprigged gown of Flora in Botticelli's *Primavera,* and a succession of fashion designers' creations and beautiful women of art throughout history have announced spring's coming with flowers, symbol of beauty in nature, replete with the promise of nature's everlasting renewal.

Botany

1. English. Jacket, ca. 1616

2. Opposite page. French. *Robe à la française,* ca. 1775

3. Opposite page. Left: French. Dress, ca. 1864. Right: American. Dress, ca. 1856

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5. Opposite page.
Christian Dior.
Ball gown, ca. 1950

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9. Opposite page. Left: Valentino. Evening dress, 1969. Right: Anthony Muto. Micro-mini evening dress, ca. 1965

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Robe à la française, 1740s

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Metamorphosis

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21. Opposite page. Mainbocher(?).
Pair of gloves, ca. 1938

22. Jean Patou by Christian Lacroix.
Rose turban, 1986

Plate Captions

1. English. Jacket, ca. 1616
Natural linen with colored silk and gilt embroidery, gold lace, and gilt spangles. Rogers Fund, 1923 (TSR 23.170.1)

Of the several surviving examples of its type, this jacket manifests the most sophisticated needlework. Though created in an epoch when amateurs often worked from pattern pieces pounced by master embroiderers, this jacket appears to be by the hand of a professional: it applies accomplished technique, personalized small elements, absolute clarity of design, and foliate scrolling that demonstrates the persistence of Elizabethan style in the ladder-stitched gilt thread that frames the individual botanical representations.

2. French. *Robe à la française*, ca. 1775
Polychrome patterned cream silk brocade with old rose motif. Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1960 (CI 60.40.1ab)

Although the silhouette of this dress is emphatically of the period, the rose motif represents an old form, the cabbage rose, which, through Dutch botanists, had been propagated throughout Europe by 1600. Like much eighteenth-century pattern, the floral design equivocates between naturalism and stylization: the standard centifolia (*rose de peintre*) is naturalistic at bloom, stem, and leaves, but the surround is abstracted. Significantly, though, the roses' sculpted shading suggests the weaver's proficiency with naturalism as well as with stylization.

3. Left: French. Dress, ca. 1864
Green silk moiré bands alternating with chiné *rose pattern. Gift of Frederic Edward Gibert, in memory of his wife, née Marcelle Henry Des Turneaux, 1962 (CI 62.34)*
Right: American. Dress, ca. 1856
Green silk gauze with rose-patterned chiné *ribbon bands and dark green fringe. Gift of Mrs. Frederick van Beuren Joy, in memory of Mrs. Jacob Harsen Halsted, 1983 (1983.479.6abcd)*

In the nineteenth century, the marked increase in the cultivation of varieties of roses coincided with the possibilities of accurate woven representations of botanicals. These two dresses from mid-century use a technically sophisticated representation of floral clusters. Both are of a *chiné* or warp-weave, challenging the impulse to naturalism with a technique prone to blurred image. Nonetheless, both dresses are triumphs of simulation, including shading that gives the illusion of three-dimensionality to the flowers.

4. Detail, no. 3 (left)

5. Christian Dior. Ball gown, ca. 1950
White silk organza with silk floss embroidered clover and flowering grasses. Gift of Mrs. David Kluger, 1960 (CI 60.21.1ab)

Dior believed his fashion represented optimism and innocence. He recalled in his memoirs, "A Golden Age seemed to have come again. War had passed out of sight and there were no others on the horizon." An avid gardener, Dior sought the pastoral as a modern naïveté, imagining the contemporary woman as a rustic Rima and thus with the natural grace afforded by clover and weedy grasses on silk organza. Bucolic motifs achieved with the consummate artisanry of couture materials suggest Dior's persistent paradox of innocence and sophistication.

6. Cristobal Balenciaga. Ball gown, winter 1947-48
Pleated pink silk taffeta with matching pink silk roses. Given by Lisa and Jody Greene, in memory of their loving mother, Ethel S. Greene, 1958 (CI 58.13.6ab)

Keenly historicist, Balenciaga invented a fantasy of eighteenth-century court dress, knowing that Marie Antoinette favored overdresses with swags anchored by roses. Sustained by wide panniers also modeled on the eighteenth-century example, Balenciaga renewed the rococo rose for the 1940s and 1950s.

7. Left: Adolfo. Evening ensemble, 1975
Yellow silk organza hand-painted with daffodils. Gift of Mrs. Howard W. Geiger, 1994 (1994.241abc)
Right: Adolfo. Evening ensemble, 1975
White silk organza hand-painted with bouquets of roses, lilacs, and bluebells. Gift of Mrs. Mortimer Solomon, 1975 (1975.301.11abc)

These spring evening dresses are replete with innocent hopefulness and delicate in creation. Similar to Dior in seeking an innocence through the referent of flowers, Adolfo even forsakes a sophisticated embroidery for hand-painted flowers of a more deliberately naive quality. Though wrought in silk organza and elegant, the reference of these aproned dresses is Great Plains folkloric.

8. Left: Isaac Mizrahi. "Exploded Poppy" dress, spring 1992
Red-and-black printed white cotton piqué. Gift of Isaac Mizrahi, 1992 (1992.259ab)
Right: Perry Ellis. "Carnation" ensemble, 1985
Red-and-white printed gray crêpe de chine. Courtesy Laura O'Brien

The flower in photography becomes a source for late twentieth-century design (as well as for the art of Warhol, Cornell, Rauschenberg, and others): Mizrahi's hyperbolic poppy is derived from Irving Penn's flower photographs; Ellis's carnations are from declamatory Burpee seed packages.

9. Left: Valentino. Evening dress, 1969
White cotton organdy with silk lilies of the valley applied to embroidered leaf clusters. Gift of Mrs. Lyn Revson, 1975 (1975.346.12ab)
Right: Anthony Muto. Micro-mini evening dress, ca. 1965
Ivory silk with applied silk flowers. Courtesy Anthony Muto

The 1960s created a dialectic of Space Age and flower power. Sleek fashion technology and minimalism coincided with a romantic return-to-nature evocation of the pastoral. Spare silhouettes burst into flower in works by Valentino and Muto. To Cecil Beaton a difference between Europe and America was that Americans loved only the freshest flowers, while Europeans kept bouquets and arrangements into their decline, loving the dissipation. However, Muto, an American, specifically chose old silk flowers in colors that had faded to achieve an effect more evocative of the Old World.

10. Left: Koji Tatsuno. Coat, 1993
Latex inset with leaves. Courtesy Koji Tatsuno
Right: Koji Tatsuno. Micro-mini dress, 1993
Latex inset with dyed leaves. Courtesy Koji Tatsuno

Tatsuno embeds leaves into a scrim to achieve a veil-of-nature effect using contemporary technology of Wordsworthian sensibility. The idea is both traditional and contemporary, betokening the keepsake and memories of nature, and suggesting the incorporation of nature's objets trouvés in recent art.

11. English(?). *Robe à la française*, 1740s
Painted ivory silk moiré with crochet netting. Courtesy Cora Ginsburg

The painted silks of rococo Europe were imported from the East, chiefly from India and China. This particular example, with stylization and exotic floral and foliate patterning, is probably based on Indian prototypes.

12. Detail, no. 11

This detail calls attention to an unusual lace trim, one of the earliest extant examples of this form of crochet lace on a gown. It is additionally embellished with three-dimensional representations of sprigs, which evolved later in the century to become more complicated fly-fringe and passementerie reiterations of floral motifs.

13. Left: French. Man's court ensemble, 1770s
Black silk voided velvet with dark rust satin ground and silk floss embroidery à la disposition. *Rogers Fund, 1932 (32.35.12ac)*
Right: French. Man's court ensemble, 1780s
Brown silk voided velvet with silk floss embroidery à la disposition. *Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1961 (CI61.13.2ac)*

Men were adorned with flowers throughout the eighteenth century, but those representations were fantastical and only infrequently naturalistic. In men's court costumes, embroidery was done to the tailored pattern pieces. Even the buttons repeated floral motifs seen in the larger fields of embroidery.

14. Left: Mariano Fortuny. Evening jacket, ca. 1945
Dark red silk velvet with stenciled silver carnation bouquets. Gift of The Duchess Pini di San Miniato, 1980 (1980.186b)
Right: Mariano Fortuny. Evening jacket, 1930s
Dark red velvet with stenciled gold foliate motif. Gift of Mrs. Ernest Frederick Eidlitz, 1975 (1975.382)

The jacket on the left is identical to one in Fortuny's personal collection at the Palazzo Orfei. Printed on crimson velvet, the floral motif suggests carnations. However, Fortuny's original sources probably depicted cornflowers. The jacket on the right has an abstracted foliate pattern taken from a textile design by fifteenth-century Italian painter Jacopo Bellini.

15. Jean-Philippe Worth. Evening dress, ca. 1898
Black silk velvet on voided white satin ground. Gift of Eva Drexel Dahlgren, 1976 (1976.258.2ab)

Worth's black roses suggest the melancholy and wistful world of poets Charles Baudelaire and Algernon Charles Swinburne. While less innovative than his famous father—who is known for establishing the standards and practices of the haute couture—Jean-Philippe Worth nonetheless was technically proficient and, in this example, demonstrates that he knew the dramatic reading of a textile in black and white.

16. Left: Hubert de Givenchy. Evening dress, ca. 1958
Black velvet cutwork in floral pattern over black silk. Gift of Rodman A. Heeren, 1961 (CI 61.54.2)
Right: Yves Saint Laurent. Cocktail ensemble, ca. 1967
Black silk embroidered flowers and leaves with raised pompoms over black wool bouclé. Gift of Jane Holzer, 1977 (1977.115.17ab)

The metaphor of the black flower—beauty mated to iniquity—can be read as the most sinister sign in nature. Shakespeare and Tennyson make reference to death from which the flowers spring; death accompanies the flowers as thorns surround roses. Moreover, black as a color of decadence only resolves the cycle of impermanence, "Growth and decay, shining and darkening," as twentieth-century poet Robinson Jeffers described.

17. Willa Kim. Cocoon coat, 1988
Painted green silk organza. Courtesy The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology

Grandville's metamorphic flowers and Walter Crane's "masque of flowers" are realized in a lettuce coat by Willa Kim. The nursery rhyme goes, "Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow? With silver bells, and cockle shells, and pretty maids all in a row." Kim has created this coat for such a pretty maid.

18. Hubert de Givenchy. Evening bolero, 1952
Garnet velvet and silk organza with crystal beading. Isabel Shults Fund, 1994 (1994.405.2)

Givenchy's first collections were characterized by a fresh, pretty *jeune fille* approach to the couture: the rose bolero from his second collection expresses this pert purity. Related imagery of the period includes the die-cut transfigurative covers of Fleur Cowles's *Flair* magazine, including the metamorphosis of woman into rose.

19. American. Bonnet, ca. 1868
Plaited straw with silk-velvet flowers. Gift of Mrs. Frederic P. Chapman, 1966 (CI 66.52)

The comely medium of millinery has long been enchanted by flowers for all seasons, most especially for the bonnets of spring. Here, nature is vividly emulated in flowers on stems that are tremblant.

20. Left: Elsa Schiaparelli. "Patriotic" hat, summer 1940
Red, white, and blue fabric flowers and down dandelions. Gift of Mrs. Edna Woolman Chase, 1940 (40.101)
Right: Elsa Schiaparelli. Hat, summer 1951
Silk roses on buckram. Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (CI 53.40.24e)

Flowers are frequently symbolic. Edna Woolman Chase's hat was created for a patriotic auction. Not only do the colors of the flowers specifically allude to the flag, they also call to mind fields and flowers of the New World in the manner of contemporary Americana, such as Agnes de Mille's *Rodeo* (1942), Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938), or Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* (1944).

21. Mainbocher(?). Pair of gloves, ca. 1938
Black silk velvet with red and pink silk petals. Gift of Mrs. Harrison Williams, 1952 (CI 52.40.2ab)

From his first collections, Mainbocher applied three-dimensional flowers in combination with printed and plain textiles to elaborate and emphasize the beauty of his clients.

22. Jean Patou by Christian Lacroix. Rose turban, 1986
Pink and magenta silk satin. Courtesy The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology

One of the signatures of Lacroix is whimsy: his accessories are frequently theatrical in their exaggeration. This hat and the wearer's hair are worn pulled forward in the manner of the 1940s, perhaps in a couture variation on Carmen Miranda's top-knot harvest.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the costumes illustrated in this publication are in the collection of The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.